

Miniature Steins

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Charms

By Les Paul

History

Egyptians wore charm bracelets and necklaces as signs of status and as ID tags for the afterlife. Christians wore fish charms during the Roman Empire to identify themselves to other Christians. Kings and knights of the Middle Ages used charms with incantations against their enemies, and with superstitions for their protection in battle.

Charms were first used as just jewelry in the early 20th century. Then they were made very fashionable by the bracelets of Queen Victoria. If you are not old enough to remember the gumball charms of the 1940's, maybe you can recall the bobby socks and charm bracelets all the cool girls wore in the 50's.

Charms and pins were also fashionable souvenirs in Germany a hundred years ago. They decorated hats and walking sticks as well as bracelets. Some of these charms were tiny beer steins. See the dapper young gentleman in figure 1.



Size

But when is a tiny beer stein a "charm" and when is it just a small miniature? The painted gray metal brewery steins discussed in a prior article are about 1 1/2 inch tall (figure 2). They were often worn as charms or as part of a pin, hanging from a field of ribbon. But only the similar, and much smaller, metal stein on the left of figure 2 would fit in my personal definition of a "charm," because it is one inch or less tall. That's my charm cut off: one inch or 2.5 cm.

figure 2



figure 3



The same firm that made the series of VA inch tall brewery steins also made these shorter one-inch versions, but they are much harder to find. I've found about 40 of the VA inch steins, but so far I have only come across five of these tiny one-inch steins (figures 2, 3, and 9). These are the largest (one inch) of the charms.

The very smallest stein charms (less than 1/2 inch) are solid metal (figure 4). The lids are not hinged and will not open. All the other photographs are of charms with hollow cylinders and lids that open. These solid type charms were commonly used for charm bracelets, which, again, were very popular in America in the 1950's.

figure 4



The ring soldered to the handle and the chain link rings prove these tiny steins were made to be charms (figure 5). Often the chain link rings are missing and lost, but the stein's handle with a new ring could still serve the necessary connecting function for attachment as a charm. The half-inch stein on the right in figure 5 is the smallest stein charm with an operational lid that I have ever seen. But this tiny stein is not rare, or even very hard to find. I've seen them made into earrings a couple of times, too.

figure 5



figure 6



This same stein also comes in two additional larger sizes (figure 6). The middle size (on the left) measures about 5/8ths of an inch. The larger version is a bit over 3/4th of an inch. The left side of these steins displays a flower, while the right side employs a fleur-de-lys type pattern, as seen on the gold plated version of this stein at the right in figure 6.

HB

Munich's famous Hofbräuhaus has always been very prolific with all kinds of self-advertising souvenirs. Most of these silver and gold plated HB charms are about 100 years old (figures 7, 8, and 9). Most have the HB on both the left and right sides, and most have tiny HB's on the lids, too. About half include a tiny clasp attached to the lid's interior to snap and hold the lid shut. This helps to protect the charm from damage.

figure 7



The center stein in figure 9 is one of the smaller gray paint over metal types, previously shown in figures 2 and 3. The tiny lid has incredible detail that reads, "KGL Hofbräuhaus München" written around the crown over the HB, just like the regular sized HB steins. The bulbous charm on the right in figure 9 is either "tipsy" from a base mold seam, or maybe like the author is a little too full of beer. You decide.

figure 8



figure 9



Silver

Most of the charm steins we see are silver or silver plated (figures 10-16). Charms are difficult to date, but in general modern charm steins have very poor relief detail. One very common charm stein sometimes includes a bright blue background color (figure 10). The charm on the right in this photo is the same stein as the blue one on the left, but with a very worn gold wash.



Figure 11 shows three of the worst of the modern charms with almost no discernible image, subject or design. Upon close inspection, the scene on all three of these charms is the same. There is a jug on a table in the front center. To your left is a seated gentleman. To your right a man is standing. Newer charms can also be made from pot metal and plated with only cheaper chrome or nickel, instead of silver.



The left and right charm steins in figure 11 are both based marked "Danecraft Sterling," telling us about its possible silver content. Danecraft, Inc. was founded in Providence, Rhode Island in 1934. It is owned and operated by a family that can trace their jewelry business back to the 17th century in Italy. The center stein in figure 11 is base marked "Vico" but because it has the same blurry, or terrible relief detail, scene, it was probably also made by Danecraft.

Figure 12 also shows some of the worst of the thick walled pot metal looking charms. You can find these at the flea markets or on ebay for only \$10 to \$20. And that's all that



they are worth, in my opinion. The center charm in photo 12 is base marked "sterling," and it's very shiny; but why would someone spend the money for silver if the relief quality is so bad you can hardly tell what the scene is?

Sometimes the relief is quite pronounced and discernible. The middle stein in figure 13 has nice detail. And the one on the right clearly shows an alpine chalet in the forest with a mountain in the background.



Figure 14 shows three thin walled, stamped relief decoration, charm steins. These are made by stamping the relief decoration into a flat sheet, then curving the sheet into a cylinder to form the stein's body. The first two depict Munich Maids. The third is base marked "800" and "B & B."



Figures 15 and 16 also show some of the better silver charm steins. They are all thick wall molded charms except the last one on the right in figure 16. This one is a thin wall, stamped relief decoration stein, like the three in figure 14.



PROSIT

Page 2223
June 2007

Gold

The "gold" plating on the left stein in figure 17 is wearing off the body relief and flaking off of the base. The stein on the right is the gold version of the silver charm in the middle of figure 12. Both are bottom quality.



In figure 18, the left and right steins are the gold (or gold colored) versions of the Danecraft silver charms in figure 11. The center steins in figures 18 and 19 are both thin walled gold charms.



Figure 18 helps to reveal the quality difference between the cheaper molded thick wall stein charms (on left and right), and the better stamped thin wall gold charm (center). This nice silver charm is usually seen with gold plating. It is the most common good quality golden charm that I come across. You might pick it up cheaper, but you should expect to pay \$50 to \$75 for it. Look for it in the jewelry cases at antique shows and malls. I have seen it sell on ebay for as little as \$25 and also for as much as \$100. Sometimes dealers think it's rare and I've seen it priced (not sold, just priced) for a couple hundred dollars. Again, it's really quite common. You'll find it if you're looking for charms.



Figure 19 shows much smaller molded charms on the sides, but also a very similar stamped silver/gold charm in the center. This one is smaller and has a snap clasp to firmly hold the lid shut. The left and right charm steins in figure 19 are from the same mold: silver on the left and gold (base marked 14K) on the right. These are very tiny charms and really nice miniature steins.

Inlays

Among my favorite charms are the silver steins with an attached ceramic inlay. Figure 20 shows a front inlay of Nurnberg's Coat of Arms. The Berlin Bear is on the right side of the second charm.

figure 20



The charms in both figures 21 and 22 are the same two steins. They have ceramic inlays attached to both their left and their right sides. First there is Heidelberg and Bayern on the left sides shown in figure 21. Figure 22 shows the right sides, which picture the Schloss and the Zugspitze. All four of the steins with body inlays are base marked "800."

figure 21



figure 22



The scene of Kulmbach on the center stein in figure 23 is not an applied ceramic inlay. It is just a glued on picture that is flaking off.

The charm on the left is made of brass and the stein on the right is copper.

figure 23



Base Marks

Not much can be learned from the base marks on charms, but our metal stein expert extraordinaire, Steve Smith, was able to shed some light on the subject. He told me that 800 was used in Germany since 1889. The Dutch first used 835 in 1901. The term "sterling" was started by the English and meant 925 parts of silver per 1,000. Jewelers in America copied the term, but we have no means of controlling its use here. We also find names and initials of makers on the chain links with numbers like 830 and 900 or "STG" which I assume is used as an abbreviation of sterling.

Base marks of the charms pictured include: Danecraft, Vico, Seko, B&B, HWP, JMF, AC, diVERA, Emma Haig, and an "SF" in a diamond. Danecraft was the only mark I could find in my Google search. Any additional information from you would be appreciated.

Glass

A half dozen charm size (again, an inch or less) glass steins are pictured in figures 24 and 25. They all have pins or rivets from the tops of the handles through the glass bodies. The base plates hold the bottom of the handles in place. The center stein in figure 25 has a hand painted, fired on, enamel Goose Man of Nurnberg. I just saw the same glass charm with an enameled Munich Child at Lyn and Janine Ayers' home. I thought the two steins should be paired

figure 24



figure 25



up, but he wouldn't sell his and since she was watching me, I couldn't steal it.

Over the Top!

The last two photos show the "cream of the crop." The first two steins (figure 26) are both tiny souvenirs of Nurnberg. These hollow steins both have screw off lids and tiny, tiny dice inside. At right is a tiny, but high quality, version of an English tankard. It's base marked Emma Haig Sterling.



The two monk character charms (figure 27) are not base marked, but the chain link on the smaller one is marked "830." As the ruler to the right shows, they are not my smallest charms, but they are certainly the smallest character steins I've ever seen.

figure 27



Finally, I'd like to thank our editor, Ron Fox, for leading me to the greatest charm stein I have ever seen. It was on ebay, so I should also thank the under-bidders for not recognizing its true value. WOW! This last stein is a real piece of jewelry! The stein's silver body is covered and decorated with 58 tiny rose garnets. The body has three rows or bands of jewels. The stones are lined up vertically as well. Smaller garnets at the top and larger ones at the base accommodate the stein's tapered shape. In between the four "corners" of each of the two dozen larger stones is a very tiny garnet held in place with four tiny silver pins securing the stones to the silver body. This arrangement also provides eight of the anchor pins around each of the larger jewels. The lid has one center larger stone secured by a ring of a dozen tiny garnets, again each with silver anchor pins. This incredible stein is certainly "the pick of my charm litter." I've never seen anything like it. I'll bring it to the convention to show it to everyone, but this time, Janine, I'll be the one watching you.

Photo and assistance credits for this article go to my son, Denny Paul.

